

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAN SA 01196 01 OF 02 092140Z

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 530

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 1196

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT PINS ES

SUBJ: PRESIDENT BRIEFS DIPLOMATIC CORPS ON DOMESTIC POLITICS

REF: (A) SAN SALVADOR 1091, (B) 75 SAN SALVADOR 3217

1. SUMMARY - THE PRESIDENT, DEFENSE MINISTER AND PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY GAVE A TWO HOUR BRIEFING TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ON MARCH 3 ON THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION AS THEY PERCEIVE IT. MAJOR EMPHASIS WAS PLACED ON THE EVENTS OF THE LAST TWO WEEKS REVOLVING AROUND THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN - ESPECIALLY THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE UNO OPPOSITION COALITION. HOWEVER, TWO OF THE THREE SPEAKERS PLACED THESE OCCURRENCES WITHIN THE OVERALL FRAMEWORK OF AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST CONSPIRACY AGAINST THE MOLINA GOVERNMENT AND ITS NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM. - END SUMMARY.

2. ON MARCH 3, THE DAY BEFORE THE UNO OPPOSITION COALITION PRESENTED ITS FORMAL PETITION OF WITHDRAWAL FROM THE MARCH 14 LEGISLATIVE AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS TO THE CENTRAL ELECTION COUNCIL (CCE), PRESIDENT MOLINA INVITED ALL RESIDENT AMBASSADORS AND MILITARY ATTACHES TO A BRIEFING AT THE FONOFF IN WHICH HE, THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE, AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAN SA 01196 01 OF 02 092140Z

ASSEMBLY GAVE THE GOES VIEWS OF THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION.

I ATTENDED, ACCOMPANIED BY THE DATT, AND A RESUME OF HIS NOTES ON THE BRIEFING FOLLOWS.

3. THE PRESIDENT LED OFF BY SAYING THAT HE WISHED, AS HE HAD IN THE PAST "DURING PREVIOUS DIFFICULT TIMES", TO PRESENT "FIRSHAND" THE GOES INTERPRETATION OF INTERNAL EVENTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHICH HAD BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD OR MISINTERPRETED IN THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS. HE SAID HE HOPED THE DIPLOMATS THUS WOULD BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO REACH THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS AS TO WHAT HAD OCCURRED, AND SO REPORT TO THEIR GOVERNMENTS.

4. SPEAKING FIRST, WITHOUT NOTES, PRESIDENT MOLINA BEGAN BY REAFFIRMING HIS REGIME'S TOTAL COMMITMENT SINCE ENTERING OFFICE IN 1972 TO ACCOMPLISHING A PEACEFUL TRANSFORMATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL, AGRARIAN, SOCIAL, ADMINISTRATIVE, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL SECTORS OF THE NATION. HE SAID HE REALIZED THAT A SMALL MINORITY OPPOSED HIS REGIME'S PLANS, MOSTLY FOR SELFISH ECONOMIC REASONS, BUT HE REMAINS CONVINCED THAT THE VAST MAJORITY, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH FEW ECONOMIC RESOURCES TO SPEAK OF, IS BEHIND HIM.

5. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT, BEFORE GOING INTO THE PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION, HE WANTED TO GO BACK OVER WHAT HE HAD DESCRIBED THE LAST TIME HE HAD MET WITH THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS (SAN SALVADOR 3217). USING A LARGE CHART FOR VISUAL REFERENCE, THE PRESIDENT REITERATED HIS CHARGE THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WAS UNDER ATTACK FROM THE SALVADORAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCES) AND ITS COALITION PARTNERS (PRESUMABLY THE CHRISTIAN NIMOCRATS, MNR AND UDN), WHICH ARE TRYING DESPERATELY TO WIN PUBLIC SUPPORT BY ACCUSING HIS REGIME OF FASCISM AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL PRESENT TERRORIST AND CORRUPT ACTIVITIES. USING HIS SCHEMATIC CHARTS THE PRESIDENT EXPLAINED THAT, CONTRARY TO THE COMMUNIST COALITION'S CHARGES, HIS GOVERNMENT HAD AMPLE EVIDENCE THAT IT WAS THE OPPOSITION ITSELF THAT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR RECENT TERRORIST BOMBING, KIDNAPPINGS AND ROBBERIES. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT HIS GOVERNMENT NEVERTHELESS WOULD "CONTINUE TO RUN AN HONEST CAMPAIGN" FOR THE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 14. HE CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT DESPITE THE OPPOSITION'S PERSONAL ATTACKS ON HIM, AND ITS UNCONSTITUTIONAL ACTS, HIS GOVERNMENT REMAINS COMMITTED TO WINNING THE NECESSARY MAJORITY

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SAN SA 01196 01 OF 02 092140Z

IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SO THAT IT CAN CONTINUE ON THE PATH TO A NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION.

6. THE PRESIDENT WAS FOLLOWED BY RUBEN ALFONSO "CHELE" RODRIGUEZ, ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE PCN. HE SAID HE WOULD DESCRIBE THE LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS OF WHAT WAS TAKING PLACE IN THE CAMPAIGN. HE SAID THIS WAS NECESSARY BECAUSE THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS HAD REPORTED THAT THE OPPOSITION HAD

WITHDRAWN, BUT NOT WHAT HAD FORCED IT TO DO SO. HE EXPLAINED HOW WELL ORGANIZED THE PCN WAS, HOW CAREFULLY EACH OF ITS CANDIDATES HAD BEEN SELECTED. THIS HE CONTRASTED TO THE OPPOSITION'S DISORGANIZATION AND INCOMPETENT CANDIDATE SELECTION PROCESS. HE SAID THE UNO'S MAJOR PROBLEM WAS THAT IT COULD NOT SCRAPE UP ENOUGH ELIGIBLE PARTY MEMBERS TO FILL ITS SLATES. IT HAD TO RESORT TO FRAUD (INCLUDING, HE CLAIMED, ONE CANDIDATE LONG DEAD AND BURIED), AND STILL WAS ABLE TO COMPLETE ONLY 89 OUT OF 261 MUNICIPAL SLATES. THIS LACK OF SOUND CANDIDATES, AND THE OBVIOUS ELECTORAL DEFEAT THAT AWAITED IT, WAS WHAT HAD FORCED THE UNO TO CLAIM, IN UTTER DESPERATION, THAT IT WAS ABOUT TO WITHDRAW. RODRIGUES ENDED BY SAYING THE PCN WOULD PURSUE ITS CAMPAIGN, AND THAT, DESPITE ITS TEARFUL PROTESTATIONS, THE UNO COALITION WOULD DO SO AS WELL. (A PREDICTION PROVEN WRONG THE FOLLOWING DAY.)

7. NEXT CAME MINDEF CARLOS HUMBERTO ROMERO, WHO FORCEFULLY

PRESENTED THE ARMED FORCE'S PERCEPTION OF WHAT WAS TAKING PLACE. HIS REMARKS WERE MOSTLY A DESCRIPTION OF THE THREAT OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM, HE QUOTED VARIOUS MARXIST SOURCES' CLAIMS THAT THE PATH TO COMMUNIST VICTORY LAY THROUGH CULTIVATION AND PENETRATION OF "PROGRESSIVE ELEMENTS OF THE ARMED FORCES" OF TARGET COUNTRIES. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE OPPOSITION HERE IS ATTEMPTING TO PENETRATE THE SALVADORAN ARMED FORCE. HE FINISHED BY STATING CATEGORICALLY THAT THE ARMED FORCE IS 100 PERCENT BEHIND THE PRESENT REGIME, AND THAT THERE WAS NO POSSIBILITY OF A COUP D'ETAT.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 SAN SA 01196 02 OF 02 092150Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 1196

8. THE PRESIDENT THEN ASKED FOR QUESTIONS. WHEN THERE WERE NONE, HE THANKED THE AMBASSADORS FOR THEIR ATTENTION AND RECEIVED THE CORPS' THANKS FOR THE PRESENTATION.

9. COMMENT - DESPITE CHELE RODRIGUEZ' CAREFUL ANALYSIS OF THE "CLARITY" OF THE LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS OF WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE, ALMOST EVERYONE ELSE FEELS THAT CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION REIGNS. THE UNO HAS FORMALLY ASKED THE CCE TO STRIKE ITS CANDIDATES. THE CCE HAS SAID IT WOULD STUDY THE PETITION, UNPRECEDENTED IN SALVADORAN HISTORY, AND ANNOUNCE ITS DECISION "SOON". THE ELECTION IS LESS THAN A WEEK AWAY. THE BALLOTS HAVE BEEN DISTRIBUTED. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE CCE DECIDES UNO MAY NOT WITHDRAW ITS SLATES AND UNO CANDIDATES ARE ANNOUNCED WINNERS AND REFUSE TO SERVE? IF THEIR SUPLENTE (ALTERNATES) SIMILARLY REFUSE? WOULD NEW ELECTIONS BE NECESSARY TO FILL THE VACANCIES, OR COULD PCN SUPLENTE BE SEATED? WOULD THE ASSEMBLY MERELY CONDUCT ITS BUSINESS WITH THE PCN WINNERS? ALTHOUGH THE CONSTITUTION IS CLEAR THAT A CANDIDATE, ONCE ELECTED TO PUBLIC OFFICE, MUST SERVE OR LOSE HIS POLITICAL RIGHTS FOR THE LENGTH OF HIS TERM, IT SAYS NOTHING ABOUT THE LEGALITY OF A CANDIDATE NOT CHOOSING TO RUN ONCE FORMALLY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAN SA 01196 02 OF 02 092150Z

INSCRIBED. IF THE CCE PERMITS UNO TO WITHDRAW FROM THESE ELECTIONS, WHAT THEN IS THE LEGAL POSITION OF THE COALITION PARTIES? WOULD THE CCE MOVE TO STRIP THEM OF THEIR LEGAL STATUS, AND WHAT WOULD BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH AN ACT? THE IMPLICATIONS IN TERMS OF THE 1977 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ARE ENORMOUS. THE UNO WANTS TO RUN A CANDIDATE IN 1977. WHAT WILL IT DO IF ITS LEGAL STATUS IS WITHDRAWN. THE MAYOR OF SAN SALVADOR IS THE MOST LIKELY 1977 UNO CANDIDATE. HE IS INSCRIBED FOR THIS SUNDAY'S ELECTION BUT THE UNO HAS REQUESTED THAT HIS CANDIDACY BE WITHDRAWN.

10. ALTHOUGH MANY OBSERVERS, INCLUDING THOSE WHO WISH THE PCN WELL, ARE CRITICIZING THE CCE'S DECISION NULLIFYING THE UNO LEGISLATIVE SLATE FOR SAN SALVADOR, THE PRESENCE OF RODRIGUEZ AT THE PRESIDENT'S SIDE SUGGESTS THAT MOLINA HAS DECIDED TO SUPPORT THE STRATEGY AND USED THIS MEETING TO JUSTIFY HIS REGIME'S BEHAVIOR. THE RATIONALE REMAINS CAST IN THE SIMPLISTIC TERMS OF "DEMOCRACY VS. INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM". LETTING RODRIGUEZ STATE THE JURIDICAL ARGUMENTS SUPPORTS THE SPECULATION THAT HE WAS ITS MASTERMIND. THE FACT THAT THE PRESIDENT LET

HIM APPEAR AS AN OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN INDICATES THAT MOLINA DOES NOT FEEL DISCREDITED TO THE POINT OF NOT SHARING SUCH A BILLING.

11. AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT - I UNDERSTAND THAT THE EXPLANATION GIVEN THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS WAS ALMOST THE SAME ONE GIVEN TO VARIOUS SEGMENTS OF THE ARMED FORCES IN PREVIOUS DAYS. MY PERSONAL IMPRESSION WAS THAT PRESIDENT MOLINA'S TALK WAS MAINLY A REVIEW OF HIS TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM AND A CONDEMNATION OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST TERRORIST GROUPS, AND AN EXPRESSION OF HS DESIRE TO CONTINUE GOES DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT AND THE PCN TRANSFORMATION. CHELE RODRIGUEZ LOOKED VERY SUBDUED UNTIL HE STARTED TO SPEAK. HE IS ASSUMED BY MANY TO HAVE BEEN THE PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT OF THE CLUMSY AND UNNECESSARY DISQUALIFICATION OF THE UNO SAN SALVADOR SLATE. THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE SPOKE WITH GREAT CONFIDENCE ON THE SUPPORT OF THE ARMED FORCES. THE COMING WEEK WILL BE INTERESTING AND THERE COULD BE TERRORIST INCIDENTS. MY ESTIMATE IS THAT THE PCN WILL MUDDLE THROUGH THIS ELECTION. WHAT THE LONGER TERM IMPLICATION WILL BE, PARTICULARLY FOR THE 1977 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, IS UNCLEAR AT THIS TIME.

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PAGE 03 SAN SA 01196 02 OF 02 092150Z

CONFIDENTIAL

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